UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Robert Little, #273121, Plaintiff, vs. George W. Speedy, et al. Defendant.	C/A No. 2:07-3794-CMC-RSC Report and Recommendation

This is a civil action filed *pro se* by a state prison inmate.[1] Plaintiff is currently confined at Evans Correctional Institution in Bennettsville, South Carolina. In the Complaint filed in this case, Plaintiff seeks to sue his retained post-conviction relief (PCR) attorney for allegedly violating Plaintiff's constitutional rights in connection with Defendant's unsuccessful representation of Plaintiff in connection with a PCR application. Plaintiff claims that Defendant is liable for "legal malpractice, negligence, breach of trust, false representation/cruel and unusual punishment, and misleading representation," and seeks, *inter alia*, damages in the amount of $ 350, 000.00.

Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review has been made of Plaintiff's *pro se* Complaint

[1] Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §636(b)(1), and D.S.C. Civ. R. 73.02(B)(2)(e), this magistrate judge is authorized to review all pretrial matters in such *pro se* cases and to submit findings and recommendations to the District Court. *See* 28 U.S.C. § § 1915(e); 1915A (as soon as possible after docketing, district courts should review prisoner cases to determine whether they are subject to summary dismissal).

filed in this case. This review has been conducted pursuant to the procedural provisions of 28 U.S.C. § § 1915, 1915A, and the Prison Litigation Reform Act of 1996, and in light of the following precedents: *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25 (1992); *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 324-25 (1989); *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519 (1972); *Nasim v. Warden, Md. House of Corr.*, 64 F.3d 951 (4th Cir. 1995)(*en banc*); *Todd v. Baskerville*, 712 F.2d 70 (4th Cir. 1983); *Boyce v. Alizaduh*, 595 F.2d 948 (4th Cir. 1979).

Pro se complaints are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys, *Gordon v. Leeke*, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir. 1978), and a federal district court is charged with liberally construing a complaint filed by a *pro se* litigant to allow the development of a potentially meritorious case. *Erickson v. Pardus*, _ U.S. _, 127 S. Ct. 2197 (2007); *Hughes v. Rowe*, 449 U.S. 5, 9-10 (1980); *Cruz v. Beto*, 405 U.S. 319 (1972). When a federal court is evaluating a *pro se* complaint, the plaintiff's allegations are assumed to be true. *Fine v. City of N. Y.*, 529 F.2d 70, 74 (2d Cir. 1975). Nevertheless, the requirement of liberal construction does not mean that this Court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim currently cognizable in a federal district court. *Weller v. Dep't of Social Servs.*, 901 F.2d 387 (4th Cir. 1990). Even under this less stringent standard, however, the Complaint filed in this case is subject to summary dismissal under the provisions of 28

U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) because this Court is without subject-matter jurisdiction over Plaintiff's claims.

In order for this Court to hear and decide a case, the Court must, first, have jurisdiction over the subject matter of the litigation. It is well settled that federal courts are courts of limited jurisdiction. They possess only that power authorized by Constitution and statute, *Willy v. Coastal Corp.*, 503 U.S. 131, 136-37 (1992); *Bender v. Williamsport Area School Dist.*, 475 U.S. 534, 541 (1986), which is not to be expanded by judicial decree, *American Fire & Casualty Co. v. Finn*, 341 U.S. 6 (1951). It is to be presumed that a cause lies outside this limited jurisdiction, *Turner v. Bank of N. Am.*, 4 U.S. (4 Dall.) 8, 11 (1799), and the burden of establishing the contrary rests upon the party asserting jurisdiction, *McNutt v. Gen. Motors Acceptance Corp.*, 298 U.S. 178, 182-83 (1936). The two most commonly recognized and utilized bases for federal court jurisdiction are (1) "federal question," 28 U.S.C. § 1331, and (2) "diversity of citizenship." 28 U.S.C. § 1332. The allegations contained in the Complaint filed by Plaintiff in this case do not fall within the scope of either form of this Court's limited jurisdiction, and there is no other possible basis for federal jurisdiction evident from the face of the pleading.

First, there is clearly no basis for a finding of diversity jurisdiction over this Complaint. The diversity statute, 28 U.S.C.

§ 1332(a), requires ***complete*** diversity of parties and an amount in controversy in excess of seventy-five thousand dollars ($75,000.00):

> (a) The district courts shall have original jurisdiction of all civil actions where the matter in controversy exceeds the sum or value of $75,000, exclusive of interest and costs, and is between–
>
> (1) citizens of different States[.]

28 U.S.C. § 1332 (emphasis added). Complete diversity of parties in a case means that no party on one side may be a citizen of the same state as any party on the other side. *Owen Equip. & Erection Co. v. Kroger*, 437 U.S. 365, 372-74 & nn. 13-16 (1978).

This Court has no diversity jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1332 over this case because according to the information provided by Plaintiff when he filed his Complaint, Plaintiff and Defendant are residents of South Carolina. Although it is not clear whether Plaintiff's allegations would be sufficient to support a finding that the $75,000 jurisdictional amount would be in controversy in this case, this does not matter in this case because, in absence of diversity of citizenship, the amount in controversy is irrelevant.

Second, it is clear that the essential allegations contained in the Complaint are insufficient to show that the case is one "arising under the Constitution, laws, or treaties of the United States." 28 U.S.C. § 1331. That is, the Complaint does not state a claim cognizable under this Court's "federal question"

jurisdiction. Plaintiff's Complaint primarily involves a legal malpractice claim. Plaintiff is not happy with the outcome of Defendant's legal representation. Although Plaintiff *does* assert that Defendant violated certain of Plaintiff's federal constitutional rights, such allegations fail to state a viable federal claim against Defendant, who was operating as retained defense counsel in his representation of Plaintiff because Defendant was not acting under color of law in his legal representation of Plaintiff.

In order to state a claim for damages under 42 U.S.C. § 1983,[2] an aggrieved party must sufficiently allege that he or she was injured by "the deprivation of any [of his or her] rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the [United States] Constitution and laws" by a "person" acting "under color of state law." *See* 42 U.S.C. § 1983; *Monroe v. Page*, 365 U.S. 167 (1961); *see generally* 5 Charles Alan Wright & Arthur R. Miller, *Federal Practice and Procedure* § 1230 (2002). It is well settled that an attorney such as Defendant, whether retained, court-appointed, or a public defender, does not act under color of state law. Since

[2] Section 1983 is the procedural mechanism through which Congress provided a private civil cause of action based on allegations of federal constitutional violations by persons acting under color of state law. *Jennings v. Davis*, 476 F.2d 1271 (8th Cir. 1973). The purpose of section 1983 is to deter state actors from using badge of their authority to deprive individuals of their *federally guaranteed* rights and to provide relief to victims if such deterrence fails. *McKnight v. Rees*, 88 F.3d 417(6th Cir. 1996)(emphasis added).

such action is a jurisdictional prerequisite for any civil action brought under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, it is clear that Plaintiff's allegations of malpractice by Defendant fail to state a viable federal claim under § 1983. *See Deas v. Potts*, 547 F.2d 800 (4th Cir. 1976)(private attorney); *Hall v. Quillen*, 631 F.2d 1154, 1155-56 (4th Cir. 1980)(court-appointed attorney); *Polk County v. Dodson*, 454 U.S. 312, 317-24 (1981)(public defender); *see also Lugar v. Edmondson Oil Co.*, 457 U.S. 922, 936 (1982)("Careful adherence to the 'state action' requirement . . . also avoids imposing on the State, its agencies or officials, responsibility for conduct for which they cannot fairly be blamed."). Additionally, negligence, legal malpractice, and other alleged violations of duties of care arising from state law are not actionable under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. *See DeShaney v. Winnebago County Dep't of Soc. Servs.*, 489 U.S. 189, 200-03 (1989); *Daniels v. Williams*, 474 U.S. 327, 328-36 (1986); *Davidson v. Cannon*, 474 U.S. 344, 345-48 (1986); *Ruefly v. Landon*, 825 F.2d 792, 793-94 (4th Cir. 1987); *Pink v. Lester*, 52 F.3d 73 (4th Cir. 1995)(applying *Daniels v. Williams* and *Ruefly v. Landon*: "The district court properly held that *Daniels* bars an action under § 1983 for negligent conduct[.]").

Negligence and legal malpractice and the other claims raised by Plaintiff are causes of action arising under South Carolina law. *See, e.g., Mitchell v. Holler*, 311 S.C. 406, 429 S.E.2d 793 (1993);

Yarborough v. Rogers, 306 S.C. 260, 411 S.E.2d 424 (1991). Although a civil action for negligence, legal malpractice, breach of trust, and/or false representation would be cognizable in this court under the diversity statute, if that statute's requirements are satisfied, *see Cianbro Corp. v. Jeffcoat & Martin*, 804 F. Supp. 784, 788-91 (D.S.C. 1992), as stated earlier, there is no diversity of citizenship evident in this case.

Although federal courts faced with claims that fall within the courts' federal question jurisdiction have discretion to decide pendent state law claims *if* the federal and state claims arise out of a common nucleus of operative fact, "[i]f the federal claims are dismissed before trial ... the state claim[s] should be dismissed as well." *Webb v. McCullough*, 828 F.2d 1151, 1160 (6th Cir. 1987); *see United Mine Workers v. Gibbs*, 383 U.S. 715 (1966). Because, as stated above, Plaintiff fails to state a viable claim cognizable under this Court's federal question jurisdiction, this Court should dismiss all the state law claims stated in the Complaint without prejudice so that Plaintiff may pursue his remedies in an appropriate state forum should he choose to do so.

Recommendation

Accordingly, it is recommended that the District Court dismiss the Complaint in this case *without prejudice* and without issuance and service of process. *See Denton v. Hernandez; Neitzke v. Williams; Haines v. Kerner; Brown v. Briscoe*, 998 F.2d 201, 202-04

(4th Cir. 1993); *Boyce v. Alizaduh; Todd v. Baskerville*, 712 F.2d at 74; *see also* 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B); 28 U.S.C. § 1915A (as soon as possible after docketing, district courts should review prisoner cases to determine whether they are subject to summary dismissal). Plaintiff's attention is directed to the important notice on the next page.

Robert S. Carr
United States Magistrate Judge

December 14, 2007
Charleston, South Carolina

Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation

The parties are advised that they may file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation with the District Court Judge. Objections must specifically identify the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made and the basis for such objections. In the absence of a timely filed objection, a district court judge need not conduct a de novo review, but instead must "only satisfy itself that there is no clear error on the face of the record in order to accept the recommendation." *Diamond v. Colonial Life & Acc. Ins. Co.*, 416 F.3d 310 (4th Cir. 2005).

Specific written objections must be filed within ten (10) days of the date of service of this Report and Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b). The time calculation of this ten-day period excludes weekends and holidays and provides for an additional three (3) days for filing by mail. Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a) & (e). Filing by mail pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections to:

Larry W. Propes, Clerk
United States District Court
P.O. Box 835
Charleston, South Carolina 29402

Failure to timely file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of the District Court based upon such Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); *United States v. Schronce*, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984); *Wright v. Collins*, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985).